

Acquisition Center of Excellence Will Drive New Capabilities to the Warfighter

Washington, D.C.—Laying the cornerstone for a top-to-bottom reform of the way the Service develops and buys weapons systems, the Air Force today opened a new Acquisition Center of Excellence (ACE).

The ACE's primary mission is to help acquisition professionals cut through burdensome, unproductive processes that slow the fielding of new warfighting capabilities. The new office, led by a Senior Executive Service member, also will be the driving force for implementing "Agile Acquisition," a sweeping series of initiatives designed to streamline the Air Force's acquisition systems. The plan was endorsed at a meeting of the Air Force's four-star generals and senior civilians in November 2001.

"Our acquisition system must be as agile and flexible as our warfighters," said Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche. "It must identify the right targets and the best practices that enable us to provide the most cost-effective systems to the field. This Acquisition Center of Excellence is an ideal forum to deliver these results."

The major thrusts of Agile Acquisition are captured in six new reform-oriented "Lightning Bolts" developed by Air Force Acquisition leaders. They are:

- **Results, Not Process**—A wholesale assault on non-value-added processes under the Air Force's control that slow the acquisition process.
- **Spiral: Success in Increments**—An Air Force-wide initiative to synchronize spi-

ral development efforts across the requirements, resources, development, testing, and sustainment communities.

- **Roadblock Buster**—Using the ACE to cut through red tape and, where necessary, to speed acquisition, to issue waivers to non-productive Air Force processes.
- **Breeding Innovators**—A comprehensive effort to train acquisition professionals to be innovators, and to replace risk aversion with risk management.
- **Program Executive Office/Services Contracts**—A central source of guidance, assistance, and policy development for Air Force services contracts, which now account for nearly half of all acquisition dollars.
- **Idea Pipeline**—A drive to establish better conduits for the exchange of ideas, innovations, and best business practices between industry and the Air Force.

"My charge from the Secretary is to foster a culture of innovation and reasonable risk-taking," said Dr. Marvin Sambur, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition. "Only if we do this will we be able to shorten acquisition cycle times, insert new technologies into systems throughout their life cycles, and deliver today's technology today."

"Agile Acquisition provides the strategy to do just that. The Lightning Bolts provide the road map, and the new ACE gives us the tools to succeed," Sambur said. "We want to work closely with our industrial partners to mine their best ideas so as to develop both an agile and credible acquisition process."

While headquartered at the Pentagon, the ACE will work closely with Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) and Air Force Space Command, the two Air Force commands that acquire most major systems.

"The changes Agile Acquisition will demand are revolutionary! That's as it should be. Our world, and our mission, have changed radically in the past few months," said Gen. Lester Lyles, Commander, AFMC.

"We must change with it to ensure we provide the warfighter a responsive and effective acquisition system that meets his changing needs."

Lyles pointed out that Agile Acquisition will mesh perfectly with AFMC's Enterprise Management initiative. "These two efforts will work together to take us where we need to go to keep America's warfighters the most powerful and respected force in the world," he said.

The need to free the Acquisition community to accept reasonable risk and innovate is crucial to the continued success of the Air Force, according to Gen. John Jumper, Air Force Chief of Staff. The requirements and development processes simply have to be

more responsive, he said, and the ACE will play a major role in making that happen. "We may—actually we know we will—make some mistakes along the way. That's OK. Our unbridled fear of mistakes is costing us far more than any sensible risktaking ever will," Jumper said.

Implementation of the Lightning Bolts is on a "very aggressive" schedule, said Darleen Druyun, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Acquisition Management. She said she is particularly intent on stripping from Air Force regulations any "non-value-added" processes that are not required by law.

"Too often, we complain that the law requires us to do this or to do that, when in fact it's our own regulations implementing the law that are the culprits. Sometimes, we are our own worst enemies," she said. "That is about to change."

"We need to get on with this. If there's a consensus on anything in the area of acquisition reform, it is that there's been more than enough study. It's time for action," Druyun said.

Editor's Note: This information is in the public domain at <http://www.af.mil>.